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FEMA comes to St. Joseph County to help flood victims apply for aid

FEMA is setting up a Help Center in St. Joseph County to help flood victims apply for federal disaster aid. (WSBT photo)

By WSBT News1

Story Updated: Mar 5, 2008 at 4:59 PM EST

ST. JOSEPH CO. — Severe weather earlier this year caused major flooding around our area.

Now homes and businesses in St. Joseph County are eligible for federal disaster assistance.

FEMA is setting up a Help Center for people to apply for federal aid from January and February's heavy rains.

They have experts on hand to help you find out what aid you're eligible for, and what you can expect.

"If you are not sure if you've got damage or not, then you need to register just to make sure you are in the system in case you do have damage," said FEMA Representative Tim Robinson.

The Disaster Recovery Center is set up at the Penn Township South Fire Station on Jackson Road in Mishawaka.

They'll be open through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The Small Business Administration is also available to help with funding.

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3/5/2008 7:00:00 PM

County Residents To Get Flood Assistance

Tim Robertson
Staff Writer

Assistance is on the way for area residents recovering from the flooding of recent months, Emergency Management Director Ed Rock told the Kosciusko County Commissioners Tuesday.

But the verdict is still out on whether public municipalities also will qualify for aid.

Rock told the commissioners 22 Kosciusko County households met with Federal Emergency Management agents while the disaster recovery center was open in Winona Lake Thursday through Monday. Help was available to residents because Indiana qualified for a federal disaster declaration after widespread flooding damaged homes and businesses around the state.

Rock said Kosciusko County also submitted damage assessments to FEMA for assistance for damage to public infrastructure. FEMA accepted \$400,000 of the assessed public damage in Kosciusko County, which Rock said exceeds the \$238,000 needed to qualify for aid. However, the county will not officially be eligible for public aid until the state receives another federal disaster declaration focused on the public sector. For that to happen, Rock told the commissioners, FEMA must accept an assessment of \$7.5 million in damages statewide.

The commissioners approved a request from District 2 emergency management for Kosciusko County to become the fiscal agent managing a state grant to help fund a transition of emergency response radio systems within the district to an 800 Mhz system. Rock told the commissioners the state will most likely require the transition to the 800 Mhz system in the near future in an effort to ease statewide emergency communications. Rock said the grant would fund equipment changes in the emergency dispatch centers to make them capable of supporting an 800 Mhz system. Rock said the amount of grant money available has not yet been set.

"While they're forcing it and willing to pay for it, I guess this is the time to get it," Commissioner Ron Truex said.

In other news, a maintenance job completed about three years ago is still costing the county money. County Administrator Ron Robinson told the commissioners the county has yet to reach closure with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management after removing a 10,000-gallon gas tank from under a county parking north of the Justice Building.

Robinson said the county installed three wells to test the site for contamination. He said only one of the wells showed slight traces of contamination.

The problem, Robinson told the commissioners, is that IDEM changed the testing requirements while tests were being conducted on the site. Now, Robinson said, IDEM is requiring the county to implement a testing cycle which will cost the county more than \$2,000 every three months. If carried out to the maximum length of eight quarters, the cycle would cost the county \$18,000.

Robinson said the situation is a case of the state wasting the county's money.

"Every time we do something, they want something else done," Robinson said.

Commissioner Brad Jackson agreed. "We're wasting money, period," he said.

The commissioners voted to pay for a three-quarter cycle, then send a letter to IDEM requesting closure.

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First of Two Tornado Drills Goes Well in Marion County

By Devon Scott

3/5/2008

Sirens sounded around central Indiana Wednesday. The reason? A tornado drill as part of "Severe Weather Awareness Week." Schools and government agencies took part, enacting their own severe weather plans.

Marion County Emergency Management Director John Ball says he is pleased with how the drill went. Ball says they have added layers of the siren to spread out the sound around the county.

Ball also says they are almost done with a complete overhaul of the siren system, including replacing 120 of the sirens. The siren system in Marion County had not been updated in many years.

Ball says the next step is to add new ways to get the word out about tornadic activity, including phone and text messages. A new system is also being worked on to better pinpoint a storm's track.

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Tippecanoe County Siren Test Successful

Updated: March 5, 2008 06:53 PM EST

By: Renetta DuBose

Sirens went off throughout the county Wednesday, but it was only a test. The alert starts tornado season and helps prepare people for what to do during an emergency. Tippecanoe County Emergency Management Assistant Deputy Director Martin Webb said the test went according to plan. The National Weather Service in Indianapolis issued the alert at 11:14 a.m.. Webb said this siren test happened in all 92 Indiana counties. TEMA set off all of the county's 72 alarms for the start of tornado season. Webb said the test is designed to help families get their disaster plans in place before severe weather strikes.

"We highly stress that people should turn to their local media. As well as do some active planning within their own families. And collectively decide how they would handle it when the outdoor warning system is activated," said Martin Webb, TEMA Assistant Deputy Director.

Webb said although this was a statewide annual test, the county sounds the alarms monthly.

"Locally here in the county we do a test on the first Saturday of every month to test our own interior system," said Webb.

Webb said although tornado season typically ends around October, people need to be ready at all times.

"As we found out, especially here in recent years, with the tornado down in southern Indiana, in Evansville, even in November and December time frames we can get tornadoes. It's best to be alert all year," said Webb.

Webb said TEMA identified a problem with two sirens in the county that may have not worked properly due to the weather. He said those sirens are being worked on and will be watched during the siren test between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m..

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Sirens A Success in Tippecanoe County

Updated: March 6, 2008 05:09 AM EST

All 72 sirens in Tippecanoe County went off Wednesday night. As part of Severe Weather Awareness Week, Tippecanoe Emergency Management sounded the sirens to make sure the county is ready. It also gives families a chance to practice what they would do in a real emergency.

Christine Siemers and her family have a plan in place when the sirens go off, they head to the basement of their home.

"Probably two to three times a year we go to the basement so they're kind of used to the routine so that makes everyone more comfortable," said Siemers.

The Siemers and their neighbor, 9-year old Emma Pechin, said finding a safe spot in your home, can save you and your family from severe weather.

"Because if a tornado wrecks the house, you're downstairs," said Pechin.

TEMA's Martin Webb said every Tippecanoe County siren worked. He said the county is well covered in case of an emergency. But he said people should not rely solely on these sirens, Webb said weather alert radios should be in every home.

"We encourage everybody ya know their house may be sitting underneath that warning siren and to also have that weather alert radio just incase there's a glitch in the system one way or another it serves as a backup," said Webb.

The Siemers said they will continue to practice a plan, and tune to local media the next time they hear a siren.

"So I just think it's important because you never know if it's gonna be the real one and when it could happen because it has happened in the area before," said Siemers.

The two sirens that did not work properly in TEMA's first test this morning, were fixed and worked properly this evening.

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3/5/2008 3:00:00 PM

Emergency siren testing today

Courier Staff Report

Today is the annual day for statewide testing of emergency warning sirens as part of Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

Madison's siren testing schedule called for the sirens to sound between 10 and 11 a.m. and between 7 and 7:30 p.m.

If there is severe weather in the area during the test times, the tests will be postponed until Friday.

The city guidelines are to sound the sirens when a thunderstorm warning or a tornado warning has been issued, Police Chief John Wallace told the City Council on Tuesday night. Some people do not think the alarms should be used except to warn of a tornado, but he said a tornado can suddenly come out of a thunderstorm.

Written thunderstorm safety tips are available at the police department, he said.

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Chronicle-Tribune

Make storm plans; it could save your life

With the ice and snow on the ground, the idea of spring seems a long way off.

But this week's statewide test of our severe weather warning systems by the National Weather Service is a reminder that spring isn't that far away.

And with an Indiana spring and summer comes the threat of tornadoes and severe thunderstorms.

State and local officials are encouraging Indiana residents to practice their plan of action at this time as well.

We join that chorus.

It's a good idea to know ahead of time what your family will do when the threat of severe weather comes to Grant County.

Better to have a plan now than to try to figure it out when minutes, even seconds, count.

We would urge families especially to come up with such a plan - and practice it - so that it is fresh in the minds of children.

Think about the consequences of not doing so, especially if the children happen to be home alone. They need to know what to do, and have it down pat, so it's routine even if mom or dad isn't there to urge them along.

Having that plan in place with everyone knowing what to do will give children and parents a sense of security.

For parents with teen drivers, make sure that lesson includes what to do when they are out on the road, away from home.

If you're not sure what to say, consider these tornado and thunderstorm safety tips from the Indiana Department of Homeland Security:

- In a tornado, basements, inner rooms of a house and storm cellars provide the best protection. Stay away from exterior walls, windows and doors.
- If you are in your car, do not try to outrun a tornado because it can switch direction and can cover lots of ground quickly. Get out of your vehicle, and go into a strong building if possible. If not, lie flat in a ditch or low area and cover your head. Do not go under overpasses; wind speeds actually increase under them and can be powerful to suck a person out.
- Listen to the radio or watch TV so you can stay informed on storm warnings.
- If a thunderstorm is coming, postpone or cancel outdoor activity.
- In a thunderstorm, do not go near tall trees or any other tall objects. Seek shelter inside a building or in a hardtop vehicle, but don't touch any of the metal inside.

For more information about preparedness for severe weather and other emergencies, log on to www.in.gov/dhs.

Grant County has been lucky of late when it comes to tornadoes and severe weather - knock wood - but that doesn't mean it can't happen, and we shouldn't become complacent.

Being prepared could help keep your family safe.

Originally published March 6, 2008

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Ice downs New Castle limbs, power lines

Some of the 15,000 customers left in the dark could still be without power tonight.

By JOY LEIKER

jleiker@muncie.gannett.com

NEW CASTLE -- Frosted trees looked beautiful from afar, but up close, their icy, weighted-down limbs were like a series of wrecking balls.

As one limb fell and crossed a power line, houses fell dark. Then another. And another.

At its worst, this most recent winter storm cut power to 15,000 Henry County customers. As much as an inch and a half of ice coated power lines.

By Wednesday evening, crews had made significant gains restoring power, with only about 3,500 customers remaining in the dark. Outages included 1,500 Duke Energy customers and 2,000 from Henry REMC.

New Castle resident Scott Hill was one of many to spend part of his day cleaning up after Mother Nature. The ice was too much for the white birch tree in the front yard of a home he owns on South Main Street. Some of its limbs were pressed to the ground and interfered with traffic and a neighbor's driveway. Like others had done elsewhere, he cut with a saw and created a pile of limbs near the street.

The damage to trees and power lines was widespread. Duke Energy sent an extra 175-200 workers -- "a small army" in the words of spokesman Angeline Protogere -- from all over the state to Henry County. Henry REMC crews were aided by out-of-town workers too, said General Manager Steve Wolfrom. The seven extra crews (each crew includes a truck and two workers) doubled the company's capacity to turn the lights back on in rural Henry County.

For those who live north of New Castle, it was a repeat of January 2005, when an ice storm knocked out power to 114,000 people in East Central Indiana. That time, New Castle was magically spared. The city wasn't so lucky this time.

For some, the power outage brought a flood of business. At Dietz Electric in New Castle, Marcia Lorton said the calls from homeowners needing repairs to their electrical boxes is "more than we can handle.

"My phone did not stop ringing from 8 a.m. 'til noon. There was a 10-second break between calls," Lorton said.

An early estimate revealed a list of at least 50 customers in need of repairs. Asked how long it might take one of the company's five electricians to get to the next house that gets added to the list, Lorton said "late next week."

At Allred Residential Electrical Service, Sherri Hargan expects more calls in the coming days as utility crews work their way down the lines.

Of those 1,500 Duke customers still without power Wednesday evening, "virtually all" were supposed to be turned back on by midnight Wednesday. But among those numbers are new outages, Protogere said.

As the ice melted, it caused new limbs to fall and knock more lines. Those customers might not get service restored until today.

It might be even worse for some Henry REMC customers.

"I'd say that we're still thinking that we might not be done Thursday night," Wolfrom said. "This is very disappointing to people, but we're throwing everything we've got at it."

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Working together to save lives

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

Tribune Staff Report

Each year local National Weather Service offices issue over 500 severe thunderstorm, tornado, and flash flood warnings. However, if these warnings are not heard or people don't know the appropriate actions to take, the warnings are useless. The National Weather Service working together with the media, state and county public officials, and emergency response organizations, are committed to protecting life and property.

The following is a summary of the role each partner plays:

National Weather Service

- *Interprets weather information and issues official watches and warnings.
- *Disseminates warnings through NOAA Weather Radio, the media and emergency management.
- *Collects and disseminates storm spotter reports.
- *Provides weather safety training to schools, businesses, and the public.

News Media

- *Protect the public by broadcasting National Weather Service warnings.
- *Provide visual confirmation of dangerous weather conditions.
- *Provide important safety messages during the event.
- *Report on recovery efforts and provide the public with information on how to reach for help in recovery.
- *Educate people about severe weather and weather safety by carrying stories or special programs during severe weather preparedness week and during dangerous weather events.

State and Local Public Officials and the American Red Cross

- *Plan for and respond to extreme weather events.
- *Relay National Weather Service warnings through local warning systems.
- *Facilitate recovery efforts after disasters.
- *Promote weather safety by scheduling National Weather Service SKYWARN spotter classes.
- *Work with community leaders, businesses, and schools to ensure appropriate safety plans are in place prior to disasters.

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Are you prepared for severe weather?

Posted: Wednesday, Mar 05, 2008 - 12:27:19 pm EST

Homeland security offers tips

To focus Hoosiers' attention on the threats posed by tornadoes and thunderstorms, Governor Mitch Daniels has proclaimed March 2 through 8 as Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

The National Weather Service will conduct a statewide test of communication systems on Wednesday, March 5 between 10:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., and between 7 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 7 is the make-up drill day if weather postpones Wednesday's drill. These tests should be used as times to practice your plan.

The goal of Severe Weather Preparedness Week is to better educate people about the hazards of severe thunderstorms and tornadoes, and to help everyone be prepared should severe weather occur.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) is offering these tips during times of severe weather.

Tornado Safety Tips

- Basements, inner rooms of a house, and storm cellars provide the best protection.
- Stay away from exterior walls, windows and doors. Stay in the center of the room.
- If you are in your car do not try and outrun the tornado. It can switch direction and can cover lots of ground quickly.
- Get out of vehicle and go into a strong building if possible. If not, lie flat in a ditch or low area and cover your head.
- Do not go under overpasses, wind speeds actually increase under them and can suck you out!
- If you live in a mobile home, get out immediately. Take shelter in a building with a strong foundation.
- Listen to radio or watch TV so you can be alerted about your current situation.

Thunderstorm

Safety Tips

- If a thunderstorm is coming, postpone or cancel outdoor activity.
- Do not go near tall trees or any other tall objects.

- Seek shelter inside a building or in a hardtop vehicle, but don't touch any of the metal inside.
- Do not use the telephone. Stay away from other electronic devices, bare metal and water.
- Do not go near downed power lines.
- Keep your eye on the sky, as well listen to weather reports on the radio or TV.
- If caught out in the middle of a large body of water, return to shore as soon as possible. Get off the water immediately.
- If caught out in middle of an open field, stay a minimum of 10 feet from other people. Also, keep low and move quickly to seek shelter.

If there is no shelter, lay in a ditch or get to the lowest place around.

For more information about preparedness for severe weather and other emergencies, go to www.in.gov/dhs/3638.htm.

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Staying protected from bad weather while you're on the road

Posted: Wednesday, Mar 05, 2008 - 12:27:19 pm EST

Severe weather can threaten at any time, even while you're driving. During Indiana Severe Weather Preparedness Week, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) is urging drivers to brush up on safe severe weather driving practices and follow these lifesaving tips when severe weather strikes this spring.

"Keeping motorists safe on Hoosier roadways is a top priority for INDOT, no matter of what type of unpredictable Indiana weather comes our way this spring," said INDOT Commissioner Karl B. Browning. "We're urging all drivers to brush up on their severe weather driving strategies, because knowing what to do in tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, high winds and flooding can mean the difference between life and death for Indiana motorists and their passengers."

Hoosier drivers should use the following safety tips to help protect themselves and their passengers when severe weather strikes:

Driving in high winds

- Be aware of vehicles around you, especially large vehicles such as trucks, buses and recreational vehicles.
- Reduce your speed and correct your steering, especially when moving from a protected area to an unprotected area.
- Wind and rain often go hand-in-hand. Stay alert for slippery areas.

Driving in tornadoes

- Do not drive in tornado conditions.
- Never try to out-drive a tornado. Tornadoes change direction quickly and can lift a car or truck and toss it through the air.
- Get out of your vehicle immediately and seek shelter in a nearby building.
- If there is no time to get indoors, get out of the car and into a ditch or low-lying area.

Driving in severe

thunder storms

- Turn on your headlights, slow down and allow extra distance for braking.

- If conditions become unsafe, pull safely onto the shoulder of the road away from any trees that could fall on a vehicle, and turn on your emergency flashers.
- Stay in your car and avoid contact with metal surfaces. An automobile provides protection against lightning strikes and downed power lines.
- Approach intersections with caution, and treat blinking and malfunctioning traffic lights as stop signs.

Driving in flooding

- Never drive through water if the road is not visible.
- Never drive on a road that is closed because of flooding - it's closed for your protection.

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Published: March 05, 2008 11:20 pm

Indiana Homeland Security director visits Wabash Valley

By Deb Kelly
The Tribune-Star

TERRE HAUTE — Emergency response personnel from the Wabash Valley heard from the newly appointed executive director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security on Wednesday.

Joe Wainscott, 54, met with Indiana Task Force 7. Wainscott serves as training director for the state's Homeland Security. He was appointed Feb. 26 by Gov. Mitch Daniels to become executive director, effective March 14.

The former executive director, Col. J. Eric Dietz, recently resigned. Dietz plans to return to Purdue University to work with the Purdue Homeland Security Institute as a tenured faculty member in Purdue's College of Technology.

Task Force 7 is an interagency team made up of first responders from eight counties. It is part of the federal government's Department of Homeland Security and has been operating since 2003. Vermillion, Parke, Putnam, Vigo, Clay, Greene, Sullivan and Owen counties make up Region 7.

Representatives from emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, hospitals, health departments, communication and information technology, law enforcement, hazardous materials response teams, fire and rescue services and others meet regularly, perform drills and create plans for large-scale events.

During their monthly meeting Wednesday, members of Task Force 7 heard from Wainscott.

In an interview before the meeting, Wainscott said he wanted to take advantage of his visit to the area, which had been planned before he learned he would be appointed as executive director of IDHS.

"We're working with District 7 on realigning some funds for exercises and some technical things that we needed to do, but ... since we had this time scheduled, I wanted to be able to share my appreciation with the Task Force," he said.

"From a training perspective, I've worked pretty closely with this group," Wainscott added.

"One of my primary charges from the get-go is to establish a state-supported firefighter training system," he said, "and really it was because of the history or the background of District 7, their history of working together and collaborating – they'd already kind of broken ground on working together for larger things, such as this Task Force, for me it was a natural selection to ask them to be our first district ... for the district fire training."

Wainscott continued, "They've been very successful, they did very well, very energetic, and very supportive of training efforts – they're really able to show the rest of the state how to do it."

Wainscott is a 23-year veteran of the Indiana State Police, who also served as law enforcement coordinator for the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of Indiana. Before that, he served in the U.S. Air Force for six years.

He said his goals for IDHS as executive director are varied.

"First and foremost, to play our part in upholding public safety, providing for the safety of our Hoosiers – everything from training and supporting our public safety responders all the way through providing

inspections of such things as elevators, amusement rides and buildings, and all of those pieces are the day-to-day important pieces.

"Our role as the state emergency management center is the critical part to help coordinate response to disasters whether it be man-made or natural, and to help provide our local responders, local emergency management agencies, and the local communities with resources above and beyond what they have, in the event that they're overwhelmed by whatever that disaster might be."

For more information about Task Force 7, visit www.homelandresponder.us.

Deb Kelly can be reached at (812) 231-4254 or deb.kelly@tribstar.com.

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3/5/2008 7:00:00 PM

Sirens Tested In Kosciusko County Today For Weather Preparedness

Jennifer Peryam

Times-Union Staff Writer

Emergency sirens sounded this morning and will sound again tonight in Kosciusko County as part of Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

Governor Mitch Daniels declared March 2-8 as Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

"The purpose of setting off the sirens is to check sirens and make sure they are in good operating condition in case severe weather is to occur," said Ed Rock, Kosciusko County Emergency Management director.

Rock said March through May is generally tornado season, but a tornado can occur any time and people need to be prepared.

The goal of the week is to better educate people about the hazards of severe thunderstorms and tornadoes, and to help them be prepared in instances of severe weather.

The National Weather Service will conduct a statewide test of communication systems today.

Sirens were set off in Kosciusko County this morning from 11:15 to 11:45 by the Kosciusko County Emergency Dispatch Center. The sirens will again sound tonight from 7 to 7:30 p.m.

"With how the weather has been this winter, you never know when a tornado will strike," said Tom Brindle, emergency communication director for the Kosciusko County Emergency Dispatch Center.

He advised people need to listen to scanners, weather radios or the National Weather Service in instances of severe weather.

Brindle said Tippecanoe Valley, Warsaw and Triton school corporations have informers that sounded this morning that are weather radios programmed to receive messages from the dispatch center in instances of severe weather.

Local businesses also have the informers that sounded this morning at Zimmer Inc., Donnelley RR & Sons Co., Medtronic Sofamor Danek Mfg., Biomet, Da-Lite Screen Company Inc., Morton Powder Coating and Spartech Industries.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security offers the following tips during times of severe weather:

In the event of a tornado, stay in a basement, inner room or a house or a storm cellar and stay away from exterior walls, windows and doors. If a person is in a car, they are advised to not try and outrun the tornado because it can switch direction and cover lots of ground quickly.

In case of a thunderstorm, people are advised to postpone or cancel outdoor activities, avoid going near

tall trees or any other tall objects, and seek shelter inside a building or in a hardtop vehicle.

For more information about severe weather preparedness and other emergencies, visit www.in.gov/dhs/3638.htm

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